School personnel handbook

Towards inclusive schools for autistic students

NAME : _____

Marie Grandisson, Émilie Rajotte, Maude Gravel, Julie Godin, Christine Hamel, Myriam Chrétien-Vincent, Élise Milot, Chantal Desmarais, Mélanie M. Couture, Sarah Martin-Roy and Alice Larouche.
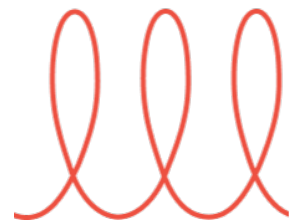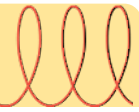
Communautés inclusives

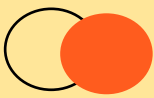Cirris
Centre interdisciplinaire de recherche en réadaptation et intégration sociale

UNIVERSITÉ LAVAL

Research project funding

- Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)

- Participation sociale et villes inclusives (PSVI)

- Centre interdisciplinaire de recherche en réadaptation et intégration sociale (CIRRIS)

- Fonds de recherche inclusion sociale (FRIS)

- Fonds de recherche du Québec - Société et Culture (FRQSC)

How to **cite this document**

For more information

Visit the Laboratoire Communautés inclusives website to learn more about this and many other ongoing projects:
https://communautesinclusives.com
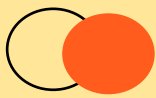
Contact Marie Grandisson marie.grandisson@fmed.ulaval.ca
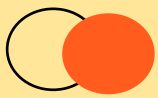
TABLE OF CONTENTS
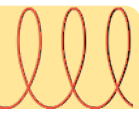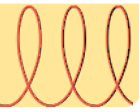
This support staff handbook has been developed to assist in the implementation of occupational therapy services to enhance the capacity of school settings to promote the participation of all students, including autistic students. It is the result of the research project *For schools that include autistic students*, directed by Marie Grandisson, a professor of occupational therapy at Université Laval. This project includes the participation of several collaborators including the great contribution of Émilie Rajotte, who completed her master's degree on the project.

For schools that include autistic students, aims to help school support staff create schools that support the participation of autistic students and their peers. It relies on an alliance between an occupational therapist and a school team to develop and implement strategies to modify school environments and activities to make them more inclusive.

Goals

This booklet is intended for school support staff involved with autistic students.
It aims to:

1. **Identify common challenges** for autistic children in school life activities;
2. **Explore the characteristics of an inclusive school** that promotes the participation of autistic students and their peers;
3. **Initiate reflection** on your school's strengths and areas for improvement to promote the participation of autistic students and their peers.

This handbook contains:

- memory aids that summarize the content covered;
- reflection activities.

We encourage you to return to this handbook regularly to help you identify ways to support the participation of all students, including those who are autistic.
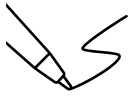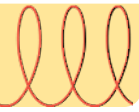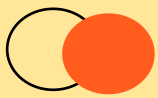
The inclusive school model was developed as part of Émilie Rajotte's master's degree. An article is in progress.

Rajotte, E., Grandisson, M., Hamel, C., Godin, J., Couture, M., Desmarais, C., and Milot (2023, in progress). An inclusive school model: How environment and activities can facilitate participation of all students.

The model **aims to**:

- Create schools that **value diversity** and **consider the strengths and challenges** of autistic students;
- Promote the **well-being** and **participation** of autistic students and their peers in all the important activities of their daily lives at school.

The model **includes**:

- **4 main types of** activities in which autistic students and their peers may encounter challenges in a school day and in school contexts.
  - These are presented in the following pages and in the video clips (list of clips in appendix).
- **Characteristics that promote participation of all students**, including those with autism:
  - Characteristics of **routines and activities**;
  - Characteristics of **school support staff and peers**;
  - Characteristics of **materials and physical spaces**.

We encourage you to modify **routines, activities, and environments** for everyone when possible and to make **small adjustments** to meet the needs of students **who still have difficulties** despite the universal modifications.

Inclusive school

Types of activities

Structured educational activities

Play and unstructured activities

Transitions and hygiene

Meals and snacks

Routines and activities

Mobilizes interests and strengths

Offers a just-right challenge

Predictable, structured and explicit

Prompts learning social skills

Integrates stimulating and calming activities

ENVIRONMENTS

School support staff and peers

Open to diversity

Offer models

Offer incentives and feedback

Materials and physical spaces

Offers visual support

Builds on technological resources

Offers defined spaces

Won't be overloaded

Adapted from Rajotte and et al. (2023, in progress): Translated into French.
*Preliminary version – Version 2 of the Hanbook will be published with the revised model.

For more information

https://youtu.be/cg2Z67J_wgU
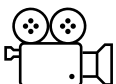
STRUCTURED EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES
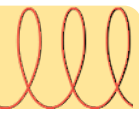
This page will help you become familiar with the description of Structured educational activities, the common expectations that support staff have of students during these activities, and the challenges that autistic students may face during these activities.

What is it?

Structured educational activities refer to activities in which **a final goal is expected and associated with instructions from the adult**.

These activities can take place in different contexts such as:
- the classroom;
- the gymnasium;
- daycare.

Examples:
- Writing about their weekend;
- Carrying out a project to create model dinosaurs as a team;
- Learning a song in a music class;
- Completing a reading or math task in class;
- Participating in a structured sports activity in the gym;
- Participating in a structured group game;
- Participating in a structured art activity.

Common expectations of students during these activities:
- Following instructions and rules;
- Maintaining appropriate behaviour;
- Starting, continuing and completing tasks within the specified time;
- Handling tools and materials properly.

For more information

https://youtu.be/2lDblBvZQqQ
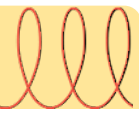
Describe your students' **strengths and challenges** for structured educational activities.

Autistic students:
- What's not going so well **(challenges)**:

- What is going well **(strengths)**:

Peers:
- What's not going so well **(challenges)**:

- What is going well **(strengths)**:

Assess your students' **participation** in structured educational activities.

	Extremely limited participation								Full participation	
Autistic students	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Peers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

PLAY AND UNSTRUCTURED ACTIVITIES

This page will help you become familiar with the description of play and unstructured, the common expectations that support staff have of students during these activities, and the challenges that autistic students may face during these activities.

What is it?

It is the set of activities in which the child **freely chooses how to use their time** according to their abilities, interests and preferences. This includes playing independently as well as cooperatively in a variety of activities while maintaining appropriate behaviour. **These activities are an integral part of school life** and are a **great time** for children **to socialize, use their energy, take a break and play**.

Examples:
- A period of free time offered in class when returning from a transition or after a more demanding activity;
- Activities done during recess;
- Free play period during lunchtime at daycare.

Common expectations of students during these activities:
- Choosing an activity;
- Participating in a suggested activity;
- Playing calmly;
- Interacting and communicating with other students;
- Sharing materials with other students;
- Maintaining appropriate behaviour.

For more information

https://youtu.be/_gOiloH8nVQ

Describe your students' **strengths and challenges** for play and unstructured activities.

Autistic students:
- What's not going so well **(challenges)**:
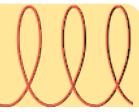

- What is going well **(strengths)**:

Peers:
- What's not going so well **(challenges)**:

- What is going well **(strengths)**:

Assess your students' **participation** in play and unstructures activities.

	Extremely limited participation								Full participation	
Autistic students	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Peers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
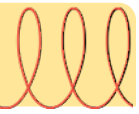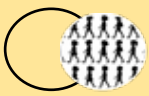
This page will help you become familiar with the description of transitions and hygiene, the common expectations that support staff have of students during these activities, and the challenges that autistic students may face during them.

What is it?

Transitions occur when there is a **change in activity, location or context**. Therefore, they are very **frequent** in school life. Some of these are related to hygiene activities and can have a significant impact on students' interpersonal relationships and self-esteem.

Examples:
- Taking material out or putting it away;
- Entering and exiting the classroom for recess or to go to a specialty class;
- Moving through the hallways;
- Lunch at the daycare;
- Arriving at and leaving the school;
- Dressing and undressing for physical education or outdoor activities;
- Going to the bathroom.

Common expectations of students during these activities:
- Following the instructions;
- Respecting the rules;
- Maintaining appropriate behaviour;
- Carrying out tasks independently and within a given time frame;
- Adapting to the unexpected.

For more information

https://youtu.be/KtTj60sYpXk
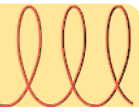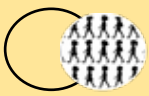
Describe your students' **strengths and challenges** for transitions and hygiene.

Autistic students:
- What's not going so well **(challenges)**:

- What is going well **(strengths)**:

**Peers:**
- What's not going so well **(challenges)**:

- What is going well **(strengths)**:

Assess your students' **participation** in transitions and hygiene.

	Extremely limited participation								Full participation	
Autistic students	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Peers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
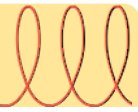
MEALS AND SNACKS

This page will help you become familiar with the description of meals and snacks, the common expectations that support staff have of students during these activities, and the challenges that autistic students may face.

What is it?

Meals and snacks are an integral part of school life They provide a great opportunity during the day to **relax and take a break, learn healthy eating habits, socialize and develop friendships and learn proper table manners**. When the environment is pleasant and comfortable, students eat more, have fewer behavioural problems, and develop a greater sense of belonging at school. Finally, a healthy diet helps them to learn better.

Examples:
- Lunch at daycare;
- Snacks at recess.

Common expectations of students during these activities:
- Using appropriate table manners and behaviour
    o Example: eating with utensils, not talking with your mouth full;
- Eating a sufficient amount of food within a specific period of time;
- Remaining seated and calm while eating;
- Socializing with peers.

For more information

https://youtu.be/LYzw7m1JrpY
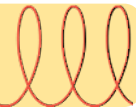
Describe your students' **strengths and challenges** for meals and snacks.

Autistic students:
- What's not going so well **(challenges)**:

- What is going well **(strengths)**:

Peers:
- What's not going so well **(challenges)**:

- What is going well **(strengths)**:

Assess your students' **participation** in meals and snacks.

	Extremely limited participation								Full participation	
Autistic students	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Peers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

What types of activities should be **prioritized**?

An inclusive school is responsive to the diversity of its students and supports the full participation and development of the full potential of all students.

To help you select a type of activity, think about the types of activities in which your autistic students often have difficulty.

To consider:
- **The importance of the challenges e**xperienced by autistic students and their peers;
- **The impact** of these on your daily life and your students' lives.

Check a maximum of 2 **priorities**.

Type of activity	Priority 1 : The most important for making our school more inclusive	Priority 2 : Important for making our school more inclusive
Structured educational activities		
Play and unstructured activities		
Transitions and hygiene		
Meals and snacks		

This tool will help you become familiar with the **different characteristics of a school that promotes the participation of autistic students and their peers**.

The following pages present **twelve characteristics** of an inclusive school that **form three groups**:
- Routines and activities;
- Support staff and peers;
- Materials and physical spaces.

Each characteristic is accompanied by a description as well as a few examples to illustrate how it can be achieved.

How to use the reflection tool?

1. Indicate the type of activity prioritized here:
- ❑ Structured educational activities
- ❑ Play and unstructured activities
- ❑ Transitions and hygiene
- ❑ Meals and snacks

2. With the help of the occupational therapist, identify a goal to improve the participation and well-being of autistic students and their peers in this type of activity.

Goal:
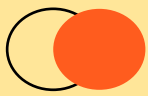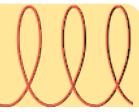
_____

_____

3. For the type of activity chosen, assess whether the characteristics of your environment and your activities are:
- **a. "Already good",** that is, they promote the full participation of autistic students and their peers

  Or
- **b.** **"Needs improvement"** to promote the full participation of everyone.

To support your reflection, **video clips** are available to you.

Video clips describing each of the three groups of characteristics as well as different strategies to improve the participation of autistic students and their peers are available.

We invite you to consult these clips according to **the goal** you identified with the help of your occupational therapist.

The content of these clips is **intended to inspire and guide you** in selecting modifications to promote the participation of autistic students and their peers in the type of activities prioritized.

Links to the clips

Clip on the characteristics of routines and activities:
https://youtu.be/-I-RdZTuVn0
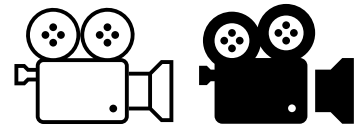
Clip on the characteristics support staff and peers:
https://youtu.be/9MzrLdWRpvo

Clip on the characteristics of the materials and physical spaces:
https://youtu.be/MTvEya2nkuo

ROUTINES AND ACTIVITIES

Mobilizes interests and strengths ❤ ❏ Already good ❏ Needs improvement	Children's **special interests or passions** are **integrated into activities** to enhance engagement, initiative and interactions. • Ex.: offer choices in the task, themes, material, reward, way of giving instructions Students' **strengths** are **utilized**. • Ex.: allow a student to offer help on a subject that they have mastered
Offers a just-right challenge ❏ Already good ❏ Needs improvement	The **requirements** are **adapted and graduated according to the students' abilities.** The tasks are **not too difficult or too easy.** • Ex.: provide more time to complete tasks, adjust expectations according to the group's abilities Tasks are **simplified as needed**. • Ex.: break down longer tasks into smaller steps, ensuring that tasks remain challenging
Predictable, structured and explicit ❏ Already good ❏ Needs improvement	Activities and routines are **consistent, clearly announced and illustrated** with visual schedules. • Ex.: use time markers, announce activities in advance, use the same routines before, during and after activities Activities and routines are **structured**. • Ex.: clarify steps, divide tasks into smaller parts Activities and routines are **explicit** in order to support the understanding of expectations and requirements. • Ex.: clarify expectations, instructions, learning goals and expected behaviours, provide models of success
Prompts learning social skills ❏ Already good ❏ Needs improvement	Routines include **activities that encourage interactions** to lead to less solitary play and more joint engagement. • Ex.: group activities with graduated requirements Includes **explicitly teaching** social skills. • Ex.: tools for identifying emotions and self-regulation strategies, teaching social rules, making expectations explicit, role-playing and social scenarios
Integrates stimulating and calming activities ❏ Already good ❏ Needs improvement	Routines **integrate intense physical activity** to improve engagement and decrease divergent task behaviours. • Ex.: alternate periods of sitting and moving activities (active breaks, Tabata, chair on the wall), alternatives to sitting Routines **integrate calming activities** to improve well-being and readiness. • Ex.: strategies to be more available (deep breathing, yoga, meditation, soft music), arrange rest areas

# MATERIALS AND PHYSICAL SPACES

Offers visual support

❑ Already good
❑ Needs improvement

The environment provides visual support for **instructions, explanations, and expectations** in the form of **images, drawings, or diagrams** to promote understanding, draw attention to a particular element, or solidify abstract concepts.
- Ex.: use visual tools (schedules, calendars, checklists, pictograms), use a visual countdown, illustrate each step of the activity with pictures, use an intensity scale for noise.

Builds on technological resources
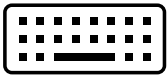
❑ Already good
❑ Needs improvement

The use of technology to **support the learning of skills required** to perform the task/activity.
- Ex.: use interactive boards to display visual supports (timer), use videos to show instructions or demonstrate an activity, use an IPad to schedule a time reminder, to support social interactions or to record information (audio recording, photos), use a computer for writing text.

Offers defined spaces
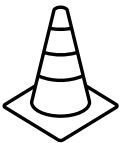
❑ Already good
❑ Needs improvement

The room or schoolyard can be **segmented into different areas** according to the activities that take place there in order to increase the predictability of the environment and clarify expectations for the students.
- Ex.: group activities, quiet activities, independent work.
Visual cues can be used to **define the different areas.**
- Ex.: Clearly define the different zones with the arrangement of the furniture or with the help of tape on the floor.

Aren't overloaded
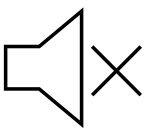
❑ Already good
❑ Needs improvement

The environment integrates strategies to **reduce the level of noise and visual stimuli.** This reduces distractions and stress, which leads to improved student participation, well-being, and engagement, as well as a decrease in problematic behaviour.
- Ex.: lighting, soundproofing material, alternating noisy and quiet activities.
The environment **offers more space** to avoid unpredictable touch.
- Ex.: using the changeroom in two groups, placing the students at the ends, defining the sitting areas on the floor with tape.

SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF AND PEERS

Open to diversity

Administration and support staff are educated in order to establish a **climate of acceptance.**

Ex.:
- Provide support staff and students with **information** about autism with an emphasis on acceptance of everyone's differences.
- Educate peers on successful ways to approach and interact with an autistic students, considering preferences and strengths.

Offer models

Needs improvement

❑ Already good
❑ Needs improvement

Modelling or peer support strategies are integrated with appropriate adult supervision and the **selection of positive peer role models**.

Ex.:
- Use peers as role models in demonstrating expectations, instructions, or desired behaviours (inviting a friend to play, sharing materials, playing together, problem-solving).
- Pair the student with a peer who acts as a positive role model during activities so they can serve as an example.

Offer incentives and feedback

❑ Already good
❑ Needs improvement

Strategies, such as **incentives** and **positive reinforcement**, **are offered to guide and encourage students**.
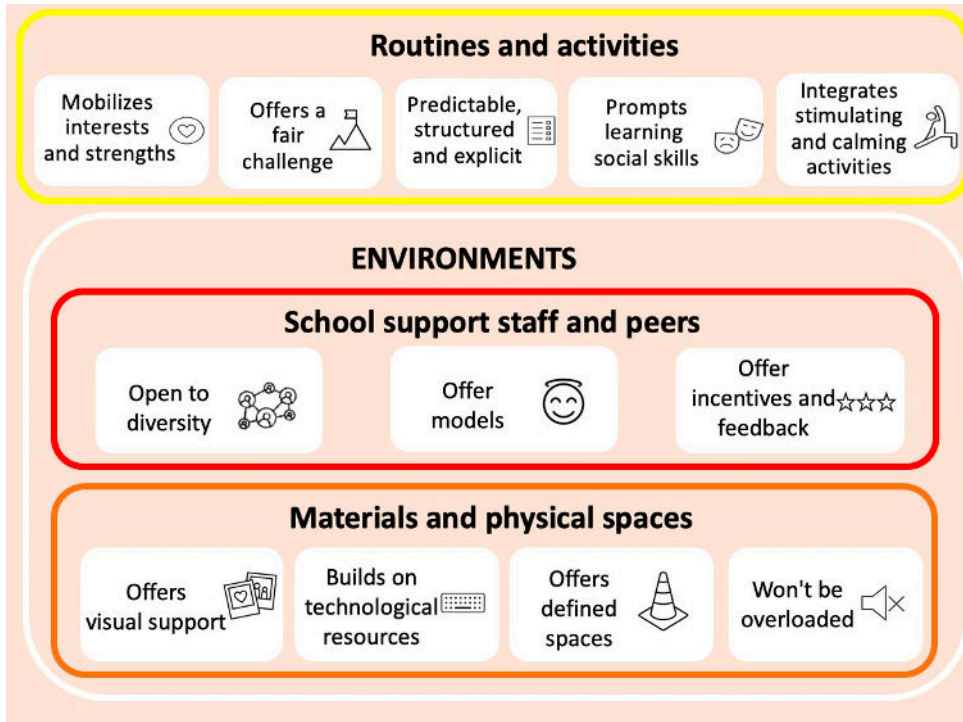
Ex.:
- Group reward system.
- Give cues and incentives (facial expressions, pointing, miming the expected action, pictures, videos) before and during the activity.
- Use humour and a playful attitude (de-dramatize mistakes, propose zany ideas)
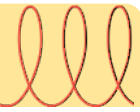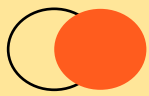
How to make your school more inclusive?

Circle the characteristics on the diagram of the inclusive school that you have identified as "needs improvement".

Prioritized activity: _____

Routines and activities

Mobilizes interests and strengths

Offers a fair challenge

Predictable, structured and explicit

Prompts learning social skills

Integrates stimulating and calming activities

ENVIRONMENTS

School support staff and peers

Open to diversity

Offer models

Offer incentives and feedback

Materials and physical spaces

Offers visual support

Builds on technological resources

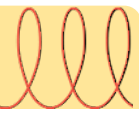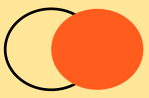Offers defined spaces

Won't be overloaded

Where to start?

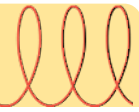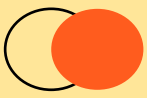With your occupational therapist, clarify the goal you want to work on.

- Goal: _____
_____

Then target a **first step** to try to make the routines and activities, as well as the environments in which they take place, more supportive of the participation of autistic students and their peers.

- First step: _____
_____

Your notes

LOGBOOK

This logbook is provided to **document expiriments of the strategies** you identified in the previous exercise. This tool allows you to **track** the strategies you try as well as the **effects you observe on your autistic students their peers**.
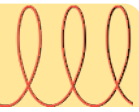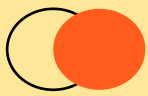
Legend

--: Deterioration

=: No change

+: Improvment

Activity or context	Strategies attempted	Number of attempts	Effects: Autistic students	Effects: Peers	Notes
			-- = +	-- = +	
			-- = +	-- = +	
			-- = +	-- = +	
			-- = +	-- = +	
			-- = +	-- = +	
			-- = +	-- = +	

Grandisson, M., Rajotte, É., et Godin, J. (2022). Engagement and rendement dans les activités à l'extérieur de la classe. Dans N. Cantin (ed.). *L'ergothérapie en milieu scolaire au Québec.* (p. 111-122). Presses de l'Université du Québec.

Grandisson, M., Rajotte, É., Godin, J., Chrétien-Vincent, M., Milot, É., and Desmarais, C. (2020). Autism spectrum disorder: How can occupational therapists support schools? *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy, 87*(1), 30-41.
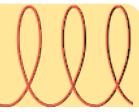https://doi.org/10.1177/0008417419838904

Rajotte, E., Grandisson, M., Hamel, C., Godin, J., Couture, M., Desmarais, C., and Milot, E. (2023, in progress). An inclusive school model: How environment and activities can facilitate participation of all students.

Rajotte, E., Grandisson, M., Hamel, C., Couture, M., Desmarais, C., Gravel, M., and Chrétien-Vincent, M. (2022). Inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorder: Promising modalities for supporting a school team. *Disability & Rehabilitation.*
https://doi.org/10.1080/09638288.2022.2057598

*Towards inclusive schools (Pour des écoles inclusives) p*roject's web page*:*
https://communautesinclusives.com/projets/pour-des-ecoles-inclusives/
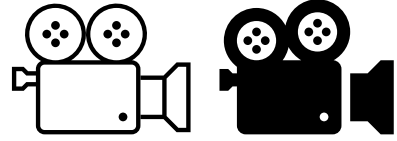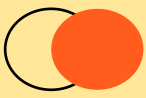
Clip on the inclusive school model:
https://youtu.be/cg2Z67J_wgU

Clip on structured educational activities:
https://youtu.be/2lDblBvZQqQ

Clip on play and unstructured activities:
https://youtu.be/_gOiloH8nVQ

Clip on transitions and hygiene:
https://youtu.be/KtTj60sYpXk

Clip on meals and snacks:
https://youtu.be/LYzw7m1JrpY

Clip on characteristics of routines and activities:
https://youtu.be/-I-RdZTuVn0

Clip on characteristics of support staff and peers:
https://youtu.be/9MzrLdWRpvo

Clip characteristics of materials and physical spaces:
https://youtu.be/MTvEya2nkuo